

# 'The lady of the garden, lawn and blackbird': Beatrix Whistler and horticulture

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Beatrix Whistler (1857-1896) was long remembered – if remembered at all – as the wife of James McNeill Whistler, the artist of *Nocturnes* and *Harmonies*, whom John Ruskin famously accused of 'flinging a pot of paint in the public's face'.<sup>1</sup> However, she was also an artist in her own right, who studied with her father, the sculptor John Birnie-Phillip, and later, it is thought, in Paris and with E.W. Godwin, the Aesthetic Movement architect and designer.<sup>2</sup> Godwin designed James McNeill Whistler's extraordinary White House in Chelsea of 1877-8, that looked like some exotic Japanese pavilion transplanted to the streets of London, and Beatrix first encountered Whistler in Godwin's artistic and literary circle, which also included the painter Louise Jopling. By the 1880s Beatrix was posing for Whistler for works including his atmospheric *Harmony in Red: Lamplight* (1885-6, The Hunterian), and after Godwin's untimely death, she married the flamboyant and outspoken artist in 1888. The couple spent eight very happy years together, mainly in Paris, but Beatrix sadly died from cancer in 1896.

A pioneering exhibition at The Hunterian in Glasgow in 1997 by Margaret F. MacDonald brought Beatrix out of her husband's shadow, and a not insignificant body of work originally attributed to James McNeill Whistler is thus now recognised as Beatrix's own.<sup>3</sup> Much of this is held by The Hunterian, and ranges from portraits to sensitive, carefully-observed watercolours of flowers and birds, probably done in the garden of Beatrix's parents' house at Merton Villa in Chelsea; designs for decorative floral tiles; stained glass; and gardening figures that decorate a 'Seasons' cabinet by Godwin and William Watt (c. 1877, Victoria and Albert Museum, London). She was also an accomplished jewellery designer, and The Hunterian owns a delightful finger-ring by her in the form of two billing doves, that presumably symbolise herself and Whistler.<sup>4</sup>

Intriguingly, however, it was not in terms of art, but of horticulture – as 'the lady of the garden, lawn and blackbird' – that Stéphane Mallarmé, the French Symbolist poet and friend of the Whistlers, spoke of Beatrix.<sup>5</sup> Taking its cue from this vivid appellation, the present article seeks to enrich our understanding of Beatrix's talents by exploring her as the maker of the garden at 110 rue du Bac in Paris, where she and Whistler lived in the 1890s; a garden that, together with the tree-shaded precincts of their previous home at 21 Cheyne Walk in Chelsea, inspired some of James McNeill Whistler's most intimate and personal images. Aspects of these images have recently been explored in the *Whistler and Nature* exhibition and related book,<sup>6</sup> but the present article is the first investigation of Beatrix's role in creating the rue du Bac garden as such.

As such, it seeks to question and even upset the notion of the garden as a 'separate sphere' that modern accounts of middle and upper-class women in the nineteenth century have often emphasised.<sup>7</sup> Rather than serving as an emblem of women's typically circumscribed existence in nineteenth-century society, as suggested by Pre-Raphaelite pictures such as Walter Howell Deverell's *The Pet* (Tate, 1853), or James Byam Shaw's *The Caged Bird* (1907; sold Christie's London, 23 March 1984), Beatrix's

rue du Bac garden can be viewed, as we will see, as a space of creative and imaginative freedom for both herself and her husband, and thus of synergy, not separation.<sup>8</sup> Where the caged birds in Deverell's and Shaw's pictures allegorise their woman owners' situation in the patriarchal society of their day,<sup>9</sup> I will argue that the birds that Beatrix kept were an integral part of her garden's character as an affective, multi-sensory environment, that brought plants, birds, and man and woman together in mutual harmony.

On one level, this reading of Beatrix's work as a gardener should come as no surprise; many nineteenth-century writers on gardens, both in Britain and in France, saw woman as horticulture's 'genius'.<sup>10</sup> Woman, by this logic, had the sensitivity to combine and select the colours and forms that made a pleasing garden; man had the physical strength to realise her visions. Ruskin had expanded this idea in his 1864 lecture 'Of Queen's Gardens' in a way that implicitly blurred the boundaries between garden and wider world, and that privileged women's agency,<sup>11</sup> and, despite Whistler's infamous court case against him for his 'pot of paint' comment, the Whistlers owned one of the books on horticulture by his keen follower Edith Chamberlain, who argued that women must be 'the presiding genii of the garden'.<sup>12</sup> The present article thus contributes to the interpretation of horticulture as a pursuit that typically expanded, rather than curtailed, women's horizons in the late nineteenth century, that historians including Bilston and Horwood have recently proposed.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, bearing in mind Chamberlain's vision of the ultimate purpose of a garden as 'beauty'<sup>14</sup> – a sentiment that resonates closely with Whistler's Aesthetic ideals in his *Ten o'Clock Lecture* of 1885 – it is intended to extend wider research on the interrelationship of art and horticulture at the fin de siècle, and to suggest that whilst de Goncourt's slightly earlier garden has been read as an exhibitionary space, Beatrix's functioned more as a generative and affective space, that also served as an outdoor studio and place for socialising.<sup>15</sup>

Beatrix did not create the rue du Bac garden from nothing; rather, she took charge of, and modified, what was apparently a somewhat neglected, long, narrow piece of ground with well-established trees and roses, accessed from the back of the Whistlers' house, a 'one-storey garden flat'.<sup>16</sup> Although this garden is today changed, we can gain an idea of its original appearance from period photographs, and accounts by friends of the Whistlers such as Joseph Pennell, who recalled 'a large garden, a real bit of country in Paris', that 'stretched away in dense undergrowth to several huge trees...over the door, there was a trellis designed by Mrs. Whistler, and there were flowers everywhere'.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, just after the Whistlers' moved to the rue du Bac in 1892, a letter from Whistler's patron Howard Mansfield to Beatrix predicted that 'as the spring comes on... [the] garden especially will renew its fine days under your zealous management', and added that 'we shall expect some reminiscence of it... from Mr. Whistler's hand'<sup>18</sup> – a comment very much in keeping with the ideal of woman as horticultural 'genius' promoted by Ruskin and Chamberlain.



Fig. 1: James McNeill Whistler, *La Belle Jardinière*, August 1894, lithograph, 32.3 x 20.8cm, © The Hunterian, University of Glasgow.

Beatrix's success in 'managing' the garden was indeed recorded by Whistler in a group of lithographs and drawings that includes *La Belle Jardinière*, a portrait of her tending plants in a decorative plant-stand that she herself had designed [Fig. 1].<sup>19</sup> From their rounded leaves and trailing growth, we can perhaps infer that these are nasturtiums – fiery orange flowers that Beatrix would have been able to cultivate quickly from seed, to give colour to the newly-acquired garden, and which, in the fashionable 'language of flowers' of the day, signified 'the fire of love'.<sup>20</sup> Whistler's friend Tissot had certainly already played on this symbolism in his portrait of his mistress Kathleen Newton wearing a sprig of nasturtiums, as she sits in his garden in London, and rests her gaze implicitly on Tissot himself in the act of painting her.<sup>21</sup>

If Beatrix grew her nasturtiums for Whistler, in keeping with Edith Chamberlain's maxim that 'The garden has ever been the headquarters of romance',<sup>22</sup> then Whistler's delicate, sensitive line in this lithograph surely speaks of his own affection in turn for her, as if to embody his comment in 1892, 'I look around and see no others as happy as we two are in each other'.<sup>23</sup> The title is wittily taken from Raphael's famous painting *La Belle Jardinière* in the Louvre, showing the Madonna and Child with St John the Baptist in a field filled with flowers, and in this

borrowing, Whistler of course celebrates Beatrix both as an artist – the maker of the elegant jardinière in which the flowers grow – and as a woman gardener (*jardinière*), even as, being the object of Whistler's affection, she also performs the traditional role of the loved one as the ideal. Like Whistler and Raphael before him, she creates and cultivates beauty, and like the Madonna she is perfect; a *dédoublement* (ambiguous conflation of roles) that Mallarmé would surely have appreciated, as a master himself of multi-layered meaning in literature. Thanks to Beatrix, the garden at the rue du Bac is thus not only a 'headquarters of romance', but also a work of art, just as Monet was later to call his garden at Giverny his 'most beautiful work of art'.<sup>24</sup>

Whistler adds still further nuance to this play of identities, since he makes the linear folds of Beatrix's skirt in *La Belle Jardinière* echo the verticals of the plant-stand, so that her tall columnar body blends with it, whilst her sketchily-rendered hat and collar seem but larger versions of the flowers and leaves that froth over the sides of the plant-stand and are picked out nearby in the sunlight. So sketchily-rendered are these flowers and leaves that the butterfly Whistler used as his signature seems to merge with them as it flits in from the right, appearing in the distinctive trefoil shape that he gave it after marrying Beatrix.<sup>25</sup> A further butterfly signature is meanwhile evident at bottom left, as if to underline the Whistlers' identity with nature; circling around the plant-stand/gardener-woman, it perhaps even suggests 'an erotics of pollination with the blossomy Beatrix'.<sup>26</sup>

Beatrix also designed latticework trellising for the rue du Bac garden, as well as for a terrace at Whistler's top-floor studio in the rue Notre-Dame des Champs near the rue du Bac.<sup>27</sup> That at the rue du Bac included the arched porch noted in Pennell's recollection, which is clearly visible in two of Whistler's lithographs. One, *The Man with a Sickle*, looks from indoors through the porch to the garden [Fig. 2]; the other looks from the garden towards the porch and house.<sup>28</sup> These pictures also show the decorative *jardinière* in context, on the lawn nearby, and we can see that its geometric structure was matched by the squared latticework of the porch.<sup>29</sup> Rambling plants grow up the porch, whilst its shelter benefits some plants in pots, including what appears to be one of the newly-fashionable *Dracaena*, or 'Dragon' plants, that were all the rage in Paris at the period.<sup>30</sup> An exotic plant from South Africa, the *Dracaena* has long strap-like leaves, that Zola had described in his novel *La Curée* as looking 'like blades of old laquer'.<sup>31</sup> Whistler's friend Monet had already grown a *Dracaena* some years earlier, as it appears in his *Artist's House at Argenteuil* (1873, Art Institute of Chicago), in a Delftware pot that would have enabled it to be wintered indoors.<sup>32</sup> And already in a fascinating photograph of Beatrix's father, the sculptor John Birnie Philip, in her childhood garden at Merton Villa in London, we find what looks like an even earlier example of its cultivation in Europe.<sup>33</sup>

These *Dracaenae* provide a vivid reminder of the radical transformations brought about by the 'great horticultural movement' of the nineteenth century, when the invention of greenhouses and the discovery of hybridisation enriched gardens with ever more unusual or dramatic plants and flowers, many introduced from far-off places by traders, explorers and empire-builders.<sup>34</sup> In seeking to understand Beatrix's horticulture at the rue du Bac, these developments are clearly an essential context, but it is interesting that *The Man with a Sickle* does not show grass being cut with a lawnmower, one of the horticultural inventions of the nineteenth century, but instead in the old-fashioned way, by hand. In this lithograph, looking



through Beatrix's latticework porch, we see, in other words, the laborious making of the emblematic lawn with which Mallarmé associated Beatrix, when, like some chivalrous knight, he paid homage to her at the rue du Bac as 'the lady of the garden, lawn and blackbird'. However, whilst this comment again celebrates Beatrix's creative transformation of nature into art – her garden – it also subtly suggests, in its reference to a blackbird, that she nonetheless allowed 'wild' nature a place in that garden. Equally, in evoking work, *The Man with a Sickle* perhaps reminds us of the further role of the garden as an outdoor studio; a place of artistic work, where Whistler, as well as drawing lithographs, even set up his etching press (the warm summer air presumably aided the drying of the ink), and where the Whistlers also loved to exchange ideas with other artists, such as Pennell and Wuerpel, as well as with writers such as Mallarmé and Count Robert de Montesquiou.

Before exploring further the balance of artifice, nature and artistic nurture in Beatrix's horticulture, it is helpful to note the context of Mallarmé's homage to her as the 'lady of the garden, lawn and blackbird'. In 1888 Mallarmé had translated Whistler's *Ten o'Clock Lecture* into French – that highly influential credo, in which Whistler had called for art to emulate the harmony of music, and, in this process, to link east and west. 'Nature's flower', Whistler had argued in his lecture, provided a 'choice selection of brilliant tones and delicate tints ... suggestions of future harmonies'; the artist must thus 'pick, and choose, and group with science' the 'elements' of nature, 'as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he bring forth from chaos glorious harmony'.<sup>35</sup> And that harmony, as Whistler made clear in his conclusion to his *Ten O'Clock Lecture*, was to take its cue from the 'beauty' that had already been '... broidered, with the birds, upon the fan of Hokusai – at the foot of Fusi-Yama'.<sup>36</sup> Art, Japan, and birds must come together to serve 'harmony', and Whistler was clearly thinking here of the Japanese images of blossom and birds that had become very popular with progressive artists in nineteenth-century Europe.

In 1889, just the year after Mallarmé's translation of the *Ten o'Clock*, a review of the reconstructed Japanese house at the Universal Exhibition in Paris had similarly compared its 'grace and lightness' to 'the idea of a pretty aviary which only needs some birds to animate it'. At the rue du Bac, Beatrix's latticework porch, that allowed free passage of light and air, must have created something not unlike the effect of a 'pretty aviary', and may even have been directly inspired by the Japanese house so recently on view in Paris, which had been widely reported and illustrated. For Beatrix added the avian element that her husband had put at the centre of Japanese art's 'beauty', and that had been missing at the Universal Exhibition, as she kept caged birds in the rue du Bac garden. These included a parrot, a mockingbird, and two Shama merles, a rare kind of Indian bird with a very sweet song, that the American art collector Charles Freer had given her.<sup>37</sup> The garden's Japanese affinities were meanwhile enhanced by a gift from de Montesquiou of two *bonsai*, grown by the 1889 Exposition's Japanese gardener himself. The manipulation of nature involved in the cultivation of *bonsai* led de Montesquiou to compare one of these to a 'horticultural foetus ... a little old monster', and against such artifice, the element of 'nature' provided by the blackbird in the garden would have been all the more telling.<sup>38</sup>

Beatrix herself designed the cages for her exotic birds at the rue du Bac, whose openwork structures would have complemented those of the porch and jardinière.<sup>39</sup> A drawing



Fig. 2: James McNeill Whistler, *The Man with a Sickle*, 1894, lithograph, 31 x 23.1cm, © The Hunterian, University of Glasgow.

by Whistler shows Beatrix tending her caged birds at the rue du Bac [Fig. 3], and since the *Dracaena* is also in view, she is presumably standing in her latticework porch, and near her jardinière.<sup>40</sup> The garden would thus have involved a sequence of complementary openwork structures, one within another, and one beside another: porch, bird-cages, jardinière – and even the latticework box-seats that Beatrix designed. A photograph of her sister's wedding party in 1894 in the rue du Bac garden shows these seats in use.<sup>41</sup>

In the context of Whistler's vision of art as 'harmony' in his *Ten o'Clock* lecture, this effect of interconnecting, openwork spaces is very interesting. For it would have immersed the visitor in a kind of all-embracing, three-dimensional 'harmony': a sequence of connecting and at least partially contiguous living-spaces for humans, plants and birds, in which floral colours and scents interwove with the sounds of bird- and human song (the garden was near the Paris Seminary of the Roman Catholic Overseas Missionaries, and the Whistlers could hear its monks chanting<sup>42</sup>). Indoors connected with outdoors via the latticework





Fig. 3: James McNeill Whistler, *Beatrix Whistler looking at her Birds*, c. 1893-5, pencil or lithographic crayon, 23.1 x 15.4cm, © The Hunterian, University of Glasgow

porch, which in turn housed Beatrix's birdcages, and opened to the lawn, with its latticework seats framing family and friends in sociable exchange, its organic filigrees of flowers cascading from the jardinière, and its plants climbing on trellises. Although – as we now see it – cages confine and imprison birds physically, lattice or trellis-work and filigree as such, of course, allow free movement of light, air, scent, sound, and stems or branches. As an ensemble, the porch, birdcages, seats, jardinière and climbing or trailing plants would thus have created a complex interplay with the larger garden beyond – the lawn, the 'masses' of flowers' described by visitors,<sup>43</sup> and the colours, shapes, scents, and 'harmonies' of the whole. If Whistler himself had a few years earlier sketched a simple 'trellis' against a wall for his patron Lady Archibald Campbell to grow plants,<sup>44</sup> it was surely Beatrix the gardener, the 'lady of the garden, lawn and blackbird', who saw the symbolic as well as the decorative potential of openwork structures.

Birdsong, after all, which floated through the garden from

the songbirds' cages, to mingle with that of its resident blackbird, had been designated 'music' – harmonious sound rather than noise – by Charles Darwin, in a key section of his *Descent of Man* of 1871. This was the book in which he first published his ground-breaking theory of sexual selection; as a result of his research into difference of colour or song in male and female birds, including the Indian Shama, it argued that the 'music' of the male bird's song was used to attract the female.<sup>45</sup> If we follow the art historian Linda Merrill's interpretation of Whistler's 1876-7 Peacock Room decoration, with its famous fighting peacocks, as a response to Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest,<sup>46</sup> then, in period terms, the garden at the rue du Bac surely replaced this conflict with 'harmony'. Sounding through the garden, the 'music' of the birds at the rue du Bac would have interlinked its multiple structures and spaces, to create a world of perfection where Whistler could set aside his battles with Ruskin and others such as F.R. Leyland, the grudging patron of his Peacock Room. He loved to listen to the singing of the monks drifting over the wall from their seminary,<sup>47</sup> and soaring over all, of course, would have been the music of the blackbird, the bird with which Mallarmé identified Beatrix, that typically sings from a rooftop or tall tree: humans, birds, and plants in harmony as one, through the art of the garden. Since Beatrix refers to the monks singing farewell to one of their community who was leaving for China, the music must have included Charles Gounod's *Chant du départ des missionnaires* (Song of the Departure of the Missionaries), always performed on such occasions.<sup>48</sup>

All was perhaps not quite perfect in the garden: the 'white parrot finally escaped [its cage] and, in a temper, climbed up a tree where no one could get it, and...starved itself to death to Whistler's grief'.<sup>49</sup> A pupil of Whistler's, Edmund Wuerpel, nonetheless recalled the rue du Bac garden as a place with firmly positive influence – 'In his roses he [Whistler] buried his troubles' – and noted that, after a hard day's work in the studio, Whistler would 'child-like ... follow [Beatrix] ... into the garden and they would walk back and forth, arm in arm, until his mood was changed'.<sup>50</sup> The new, scientific idea that birdsong was 'music' would, meanwhile, have directly complemented the poetic notion of 'correspondences' – what we now call synaesthesia, where one sensory experience merges into another – that was advocated by French Symbolist colleagues of the Whistlers like Mallarmé and de Montesquiou, and prefigured by Gounod's music, noted for its 'colours'.<sup>51</sup>

Bearing in mind Mallarmé's related emphasis on evocation and suggestion – the reason he so admired Whistler's scenes of London fog – Beatrix's filigree, lattice and trellis effects at the rue du Bac can also be compared with 18<sup>th</sup>- century 'Anglo-Chinese' or 'picturesque' gardens. These had used trellising to 'surprise' the viewer, who had to guess and surmise what lay beyond it, and were admired in French Symbolist circles. De Montesquiou, for example, bought his late colleague Edmond de Goncourt's copy of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century garden theorist Watelet's treatise on horticulture, in which trellising is praised.

<sup>52</sup> We can perhaps thus situate Beatrix's garden-making more in

the context of the French Symbolist revival of this eighteenth-century aesthetic of concealment, surprise, and suggestion, than of William Morris's inspiration from the medieval *Hortus conclusus*, enclosed by a hedge or trellis of roses, in his famous 'trellis' wallpaper. De Goncourt himself certainly built trellises in his own garden at Auteuil near Paris from the 1880s, including some in 1893 for roses and Japanese clematises, that were inspired by Marie Antoinette's *Salle des Fraîcheurs* in the Petit Trianon at Versailles.<sup>53</sup>

If Beatrix turned the rue du Bac garden into an immersive space of colour, scent and sound that would have taken its logical place alongside the aesthetic ideals of Mallarmé, de Goncourt and de Montesquiou, as well as her husband's vision of Japanese-style 'harmony', we should not lose sight of its affinities also with two other developments in nineteenth-century horticulture. The first of these is the 'wild garden', promoted by the British horticulturalist (and admirer of Ruskin!) William Robinson, in which plants and flowers were allowed to grow freely as in nature, and even to form 'colonies' and 'cascades' – terms which imply appropriation and dominance of the garden's space.<sup>54</sup> For all the geometry of Beatrix's artful latticework, trellises, cages, jardinière and seats, their setting seems, after all, with its 'dense undergrowth' and 'tall trees' recalled by Pennell, to have essentially remained semi-wild; a corner of nature that Beatrix took in hand, but only partly tamed. Even as the stack of bird-cages in *Beatrix Whistler looking at her Birds* has something of the air of a Godwin sideboard, as if part of an Aesthetic interior,<sup>55</sup> the gently-waving leaves of *Dracaena* poke towards it; nature already asserts its presence in the threshold space of Beatrix's porch. Whistler's friend and patron Arthur Eddy certainly recalled the rue du Bac garden as 'one of those quaint old gardens so often found tucked away in the midst of crumbling buildings on the ancient thoroughfares. Its narrow confines were enlarged to the eye by winding, gravelled walks and vistas of flowers and bushes; the rickety seats, half hidden by the foliage, invited the loiterer to repose.'<sup>56</sup> A period photograph of the garden, meanwhile, is intriguingly labelled 'showing woodland gateway', as if the site embraced or connected with some vestige of the woods (Bois) that centuries before had given their name to the nearby Abbaye aux Bois.<sup>57</sup>

A visiting journalist similarly noted 'masses of pink flowers', as in 'a panel by Watteau'<sup>58</sup> – presumably the roses in which Wuerpel said Whistler drowned his sorrows. The comparison with Watteau is somewhat inaccurate; pink roses are more typically found in work by his contemporaries Fragonard and Boucher. But all these artists, as part of the Rococo movement, were admired by de Goncourt, de Montesquiou, and Mallarmé, and share in the wider eighteenth-century tradition of the picturesque or Anglo-Chinese landscape garden, whose effects of nature's profusion anticipate aspects of the nineteenth-century 'wild garden'.

The surviving period photographs of the rue du Bac garden, like the 'woodland gateway' view, were taken in winter, but indicate that, in summer, rambling roses would have formed screens of living colour there, just as the flowers spill forth with Robinsonian abundance in *La Belle Jardinière*.<sup>59</sup> An 1895 letter from Whistler suggests that Beatrix was well familiar with Robinson's book about gardens in Paris, which certainly praises their 'walls of verdure' – ivy and other plants growing over walls, fences or trellises to give a 'natural' effect.<sup>60</sup> From such evidence, it would seem that Beatrix's horticulture was a judicious mix of the 'wild' with the structured (latticework and trellising) – and as

such, very much in tune with the blended aesthetic, part formal, part free, for which Robinson's colleague Gertrude Jekyll would shortly become known.

The other horticultural development to which we may perhaps relate Beatrix's garden-making is the tradition of women growing roses that the Empress Josephine had launched in France in the early nineteenth century, at Malmaison. In this sense, Whistler, in his delicate lithographs at the rue du Bac, is the modern-day Redouté to Beatrix, the garden's 'genius', and the 'lady' not only of the 'lawn' and 'blackbird', but also of the rose. If Redouté was famously commissioned by Josephine to record her roses at Malmaison, the tradition of women growing roses extends in Britain through Jane Loudon to Jekyll herself and her colleague Ellen Wilmott, who commissioned Robinson's favoured artist Alfred Parsons to paint her roses in the early twentieth century, in a conscious 'remake' of Redouté.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

The artistic, historical and contextual evidence discussed above suggests that Beatrix Whistler was a richly thoughtful woman gardener, whose work can be placed at the centre of the complex interaction of east and west, art and science, sound, sight, and scent, and human, animal and plant worlds involved in fin-de-siècle aesthetic and social ideals of 'harmony'. Her 'living' trellises, covered in flowers and foliage, were the gateway to the garden's ideal world of peace, harmony and artistic collaboration with Whistler, and would have contrasted implicitly with the industrial iron 'lattice' of the Eiffel Tower, constructed just a few years earlier to the south of the rue du Bac. Whistler had bemoaned already in London how, 'all is of iron. The windows of the Crystal Palace are seen from all points ...the painter turns aside to shut his eyes.'<sup>62</sup> If modern science – in terms of the Darwinian 'music' of birdsong – was nonetheless integral to Beatrix's vision of horticulture as harmony, her garden at the rue du Bac inspired not only fine artworks by her husband James McNeill Whistler, but also the literary garden of the sculptor Gorio in Henry James's *The Ambassadors*. Far from being imprisoned by her garden's confines, she herself used it to unify the 'spheres' of male and female endeavour, just as it also served as a place of sociable encounter for artists and writers invited there by the Whistlers. And if Beatrix's hand, touching a birdcage in *Beatrix Whistler Looking at her Birds*, draws attention to her role as that cage's designer, it also intriguingly seems to echo the shape of the butterfly monogram, as merged with Beatrix's own trefoil monogram, that Whistler had adopted after their marriage. In this sense, she 'imprints' their joint hand on her work, just as, in *La Belle Jardinière*, the butterfly merges with the garden foliage (in its trefoil, 'Beatrix' symbolism), and is attracted to the flowers that Beatrix grows (in its 'Whistler', male symbolism). Beatrix and James Whistler were arguably as much a creative team as Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret Macdonald in Glasgow at the same period in terms of architectural design.<sup>63</sup> When Beatrix died, Whistler claimed to hear her voice in the song of one of her Shama birds, and perhaps more poignantly still, saw to it that the trellis she had sketched for his own grave was installed at hers, in Chiswick.<sup>64</sup> And in due course, he too was buried there, in 1903.



## Notes

1. John Ruskin, quoted in 'James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) Cross-examination in the trial of Ruskin for Libel' (report in the *Daily News*, London, 26 November 1878), in C. Harrison et al, *Art in Theory 1815-1900* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 834. Beatrix spelt her name variously; the 'x' ending adopted in this article reflects the advice of Dr. Patricia de Montfort, Hunterian Research Curator at the University of Glasgow with responsibility for Whistler, when preparing Patricia de Montfort and Clare A.P. Willsdon, *Whistler and Nature* (London, Compton Verney and The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, in association with Paul Holberton Publishing, 2018).
2. For these and other biographical details in this paragraph, see Margaret F. MacDonald, *Beatrice Whistler Artist & Designer* (exh. cat., Glasgow, Hunterian Art Gallery, 1997), 6ff.
3. See *ibid.*, 3.
4. GLAHA:53482, The Hunterian, University of Glasgow.
5. Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Whistler, 24 April 1893, <http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/date/display/?cid=3867&year=1893&month=04&rs=22> (accessed 15 February 2019).
6. *Whistler and Nature*, Compton Verney Gallery; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle; and The Hunterian, Glasgow, 2018-20; and Clare A.P. Willsdon, 'Nature on the Margins: Parks, Gardens and Coasts in Whistler's Work of the 1880s and 90s', in de Montfort and Willsdon, *Whistler and Nature*, 77-114.
7. For a discussion of the 'separate spheres' theory, whereby women are associated with the private sphere of the home (of which the garden can be counted part), and men with the public sphere of the street, business, church, etc, see Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 36:2 (June 1993), 383-414.
8. This interpretation develops the theme of artistic partnerships explored e.g. in *Modern Couples: Art, Intimacy and the Avant-Garde* (Barbican Art Gallery, 2018), and Whitney Chadwick, *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership* (Thames and Hudson, London, 1993).
9. See Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay, *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture* (London, Routledge, 2017), 109-110, and David Dewing (ed.), *Home and Garden Paintings and Drawings of English, middle-class, urban domestic spaces 1675 to 1914* (London, Geffrye Museum, 2003), 160.
10. See e.g. the designation of women as 'the good genii of gardens', in the review of Mme. Millet's *Maison rustique des dames* in *Revue horticole* (1859), 619, cited in Clare A.P. Willsdon, *In the Gardens of Impressionism* (London, Thames & Hudson, 2004), 80.
11. John Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens', lecture, 1864, published in *Sesame and Lilies* (London, G. Allen, 1902) (first pub. 1864); see also Sarah Bilston, 'Queens of the Garden: Victorian women gardeners and the rise of the gardening advice text', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36 (2008), 2-3.
12. Edith L. Chamberlain (jointly written with Fanny Douglas and prefaced with a quotation from Ruskin's *Of Queen's Gardens*), *The Gentlewoman's Book of Gardening* (London, Henry & Co., 1892), 6-7. The Whistlers owned Chamberlain's *Town and Home Gardening* (London, Virtue & Co, 1893) (see letter from David Crol Thomson to James McNeill Whistler, 20 May 1893, <https://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/freetext/display/?cid=5779&q=Town%20and%20Home%20Gardening&year1=1829&year2=1903&rs=1> , accessed 15 February 2019).
13. Bilston, 'Queens of the Garden'; Catherine Horwood, *Gardening Women: Their Stories From 1600 to the Present* (London, Virago, 2010).
14. Chamberlain and Douglas, *The Gentlewoman's Book of Gardening*, 4.
15. This wider research includes Willsdon, *In the Gardens of Impressionism*, and *Impressionist Gardens* (Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, 2010); Sabine Schulze (ed.), *The Painter's Garden Design Inspiration Delight* (Berlin, Hatje Cantz, 2006); and Ann Dumas (ed.), *Painting the Modern Garden* (London, RA Publications, 2015). For de Goncourt, see Juliet Simpson, 'Nature as a "Musée d'art" in the French Fin-de-siècle Garden: uncovering Jules and Edmond de Goncourt's "jardin de peintre"', *Garden History*, 36:2 (Winter 2008), 229-52.
16. See entry for Beatrix Whistler, 'Garden front of 110 rue du Bac' in Hunterian Collections On-Line ( <http://collections.gla.ac.uk/#details=ecatalogue.41456> , accessed 14 February 2019).
17. E.R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (London, William Heinemann, 5th edn. 1911), 309. It has not been possible to establish the exact dimensions of the Whistlers' garden, but period photographs in the University of Glasgow Whistler Archives, such as Whistler PH1/188, show a large circular lawn surrounded by a path within a walled area near the house, as well as borders under the walls containing shrubs (probably some of the roses recalled by Wuerpel; see n. 1 below). Whistler PH1/189 suggests a woodland area was part of/ accessible from the garden.
18. Letter from Howard Mansfield to Beatrix Whistler, 21 March 1893 ( <http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/freetext/display/?cid=4001&q=zealous&year1=1829&year2=1903&rs=6> , accessed 13 Feb 2019).
19. Whistler's other lithographs showing the rue du Bac garden are Fig. 2]; *The Garden Porch*, 1894; and *Confidences in the Garden*, 1896; his drawing is Fig. 3 (all The Hunterian, University of Glasgow; see Willsdon, 'Nature on the Margins', 76-87; 93-101).
20. See e.g. 'Capucine' (nasturtium) in Anaïs de Neuville, *Le Vritable Langage des Fleurs* (Paris, Bernardin-Béchet, 1866), 130, and Mme Delacroix, *Le Langage des fleurs, nouveau vocabulaire de Flore, contenant la description des plantes employées dans le langage des fleurs* (Paris, Delarue, 1881), 22. A further meaning given by Mme Delacroix is a 'jest', also potentially relevant here, given the skit on Raphael in the title of the lithograph (*La Belle Jardinière*).
21. James Tissot, *Reading in the Garden*, 1881, oil on canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon.
22. Chamberlain and Douglas, *The Gentlewoman's Book of Gardening*, 1.
23. Letter from Whistler to Beatrix, 24 Jan, 1892, at <https://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/recno/display/?cid=06606&recno=y&Submit3=Run+Query> (accessed 26.4.2019).
24. Quoted in Jean-Pierre Hoschedé, *Claude Monet ce mal connu : intimité familiale d'un demi-siècle à Giverny de 1883 à 1926* (Geneva, Pierre Cailler, 1960), 1, 70.
25. Beatrix's own monogram was a trefoil; Whistler merged this with his butterfly symbol to 'signify his luck in marrying her' (MacDonald, *Beatrice Whistler*, 1997, 14).

26. Observation by the anonymous reviewer of this article, to whom I am indebted for sharpening my appreciation of the complexity of Whistler's fusion of self, loved one, and garden in this picture.
27. Beatrix Whistler, *Designs for a trellis for 86 rue Notre Dame des Champs, Paris*, watercolour, 1892-4, The Hunterian.
28. *The Garden Porch*, 1894, The Hunterian.
29. A period photograph of the rue du Bac garden (Whistler PH1/188, Archives and Special Collections, University of Glasgow) includes two further plant stands like that in *La Belle Jardinière*, suggesting they may have formed a decorative feature around the lawn.
30. Cf the *Dracaena* identified by David Mitchell in Monet's *The Artist's House at Argenteuil*, 1873 in Willsdon, *Impressionist Gardens*, 147. For the fashion for *Dracaenae*, see Gilberte, 'La Plante d'appartement', *Revue des arts décoratifs* (1891), 176-7.
31. Emile Zola, *The Kill* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), 38 (*La Curée*, first pub. 1872), quoted in Willsdon, 'Nature on the Margins', 83.
32. See Willsdon, *Impressionist Gardens*, 147.
33. John Birnie Philip, *seated in the garden of Merton Villa, Chelsea*, albumen print, Special Collections, University of Glasgow (Whistler PH1/27).
34. For more information on the 'great horticultural movement' as it was termed by Clémenceau in 'Causerie horticole', *Revue horticole*, 1867, 434, see Willsdon, *In the Gardens of Impressionism*, 13-16, 56-63, 80, and Chapter 4; Willsdon, *Impressionist Gardens* 12-16; and Willsdon, 'Making the Modern Garden' in *Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse* (London, RA Publications, 2015), especially 31-41.
35. Whistler, *Ten o'clock Lecture*, in Harrison *et al*, *Art in Theory*, 841.
36. *Ibid.*, 847.
37. It is unclear if these birds were the Indian Blue Rock Thrush, termed 'Shama' in Hindustani, or *Copsychus macrourus*, the white-rumped Shama, that lives in India and Asia. For the former, see T. C. Jerdon (Thomas Claverhill), *Illustrations of Indian Ornithology* (Madras, 1847), Plate XX. Merle, we might note, is the French word for a blackbird; might Mallarmé's poetic association of Beatrix with the blackbird perhaps have encouraged the gift to her in turn of Shama merles?
38. See letters from de Montesquiou to Whistler (16 November 1889 and 13 February 1891) at <http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/date/display/?cid=4113&year=1889&month=11&rs=12> and <http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/date/display/?cid=4128&year=1891&month=02&rs=4> (accessed 15 February 2019).
39. E.g. *Two Birdcages*, pen drawing, 1892-4, The Hunterian, University of Glasgow (GLAHA: 46576).
40. Cf the proximity of the jardinière to the porch in *The Man with a Sickle* [Fig. 2].
41. *Mr & Mrs Whibley's wedding group*, 1894, University of Glasgow Whistler Archives (Whistler PH1/167).
42. See Beatrix Whistler, letter to E.G. Kennedy (19 July 1893), <http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/freetext/display/?cid=9709&q=doleful&year1=1829&year2=1903&rs=4> (accessed 14 February 2019).
43. See below and n. lviii.
44. Whistler, *Trellis*, 1881, watercolour, The Hunterian, University of Glasgow (GLAHA: 46085).
45. See letter from Edward Blyth to Charles Darwin [before 25 March 1868], which refers to the *Copsychus* genus to which the Indian Shama belongs (see n. 14 at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/?docId=letters/DCP-LETT-6048.xml;query=copsy;chus;brand=default;hit.rank=1#hit.rank1>, accessed 26.4.2019); Charles Darwin, 'Vocal and Instrumental Music', in 'Secondary Sexual Characters of Birds', *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2 (London, John Murray, 1871), 48-94.
46. See Linda Merrill, *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998), 200, and Willsdon, 'Nature on the Margins', 99.
47. Edmund H. Wuerpel, 'Whistler: the Man', Part II, *The American Magazine of Art*, 27:6 (June 1934), 317.
48. See <https://missionsetrangeres.com/la-ceremonie-denvoi-en-mission-a-travers-les-siecles/> (accessed 26.4.19) for the ceremony of farewell to a monk departing on mission from the Missions Etrangères de Paris.
49. E.R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, 309.
50. Wuerpel cited in *ibid*; Wuerpel, 'Whistler the Man', 316.
51. These writers admired the ideal expressed in Baudelaire's poem 'Correspondances' in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1857 (... 'Perfumes, colours and sounds respond to one another...'); for Gounod's 'colour', see Camille Saint-Saens, *Portraits et souvenirs* (Paris, 1900, Société d'Édition artistique), 87.
52. Claude-Henri Watelet, *Essai sur les jardins* (Paris, 1764); B. Weltman-Aron, *On Other Grounds: Landscape Gardening and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (New York, State University of New York Press, 2000), 130-131; see also Willsdon, 'Nature on the Margins', 101.
53. Simpson, 'Nature as a "Musée d'art"', 234; Véronique Léonard-Rocques, *Versailles dans la littérature: mémoire et imaginaire aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Clermont-Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2005), 153.
54. William Robinson, *The Wild Garden* (London, John Murray, 1870), 31, 132.
55. For this insight I am again grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this article.
56. Arthur Eddy, *Recollections and Impressions of James A. McNeill Whistler* (Philadelphia and London, J.B. Lippincott Company, 1904), 222.
57. Whistler PH1/189, University of Glasgow Whistler Archives. Originally a Cistercian monastery, the Abbaye housed apartments where Chateaubriand, visiting his lover Mme Récamier, had felt himself 'merged with the distant silence and solitude, above the noise and tumult of a great city' (*Memoires d'outre-tombe*, Book 29, Ch. 1, Sec 5, transl. A.S. Kline, 2005, at [https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Chateaubriand/ChateaubriandMemoirsBookXXIX.php#anchor\\_Toc145913803](https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Chateaubriand/ChateaubriandMemoirsBookXXIX.php#anchor_Toc145913803) (accessed 14 February 2019).
58. Anon., 'Afternoons in Studios: A Chat with Mr. Whistler', *The Studio*, 4 (January 1895), 116.
59. These photographs are in the Whistler Archives of the University of Glasgow; see [http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/manuscripts/search/results\\_ca.cfm?ID=1520](http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/manuscripts/search/results_ca.cfm?ID=1520) (accessed 15 February 2019).
60. Letter to Beatrix (28 October 1895), <http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/date/display/?cid=6630&year=1895&month=10&rs=46> (accessed 14 February 2019), from which it may be inferred that she owned Robinson's *The Parks and Gardens of Paris*.... (London, Macmillan & Co, 1878) (see Willsdon, 'Nature on the Margins', 96-7); *ibid*, 184 ('walls of verdure').
61. See e.g. Jane C. Loudon, *The villa gardener*... (London, W. S. Orr & Co, 1850), 85; Ellen Wilmott, *The Genus Rosa* (London,

John Murray, 1914).

62. Whistler, *Ten o'Clock Lecture*, 841. The Crystal Palace was, of course, one of the first iron-structure buildings.

63. Cf Willsdon, 'Nature on the Margins,' 99 where this is discussed in relation to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal.

64. See *Whistler's Grave at Chiswick*, Process reproduction by W. Brown, c.1912-50, of a sketch of the Whistler grave, Chiswick, by a friend of James McNeill Whistler, Whistler PH1/209,

University of Glasgow Whistler Archives, and D.E. Sutherland, *Whistler A Life for Art's Sake* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2014), 294.

This article is affectionately dedicated to my late parents, Dr. John A. Willsdon and Dorothy I. Willsdon, who taught me to love both gardens and art, and encouraged my own work as an art historian.

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## Alice de Rothschild and the gardens at Waddesdon

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In accounts of the Rothschild family, Alice de Rothschild (1845–1922) has often escaped close scrutiny. Attention has been more focussed on her brother, Ferdinand (1839–1898), a collector extraordinaire, who built Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire and assembled within it, and also in his London house, a collection that became renowned even in Ferdinand's own day. Alice, like her brother and like many other members of the Rothschild family, was also a passionate collector. However, this paper will look at her activities as a gardener, at Waddesdon, but also at her own house, Eythrope, on the adjoining estate, and to a lesser extent the Villa Victoria, her property in Grasse in the south of France. The latter two were her own creations, but at Waddesdon, she was building on her brother's legacy, as his heir.<sup>1</sup>

Both Ferdinand and Alice were from the Viennese branch of the Rothschild family, two of the eight children of Anselm (1803–1874) and Charlotte (1807–1859). They were born in Paris, then moved to Vienna, but also spent time in Frankfurt, where the family originated.<sup>2</sup> Charlotte was an English Rothschild, the daughter of Nathan Mayer (1777–1836), the founder of the London branch of the family business, and as a result her children were anglophile. Ferdinand in turn moved to England and married an English cousin, Evelina, daughter of Lionel, who died in 1866. He built Waddesdon as a country retreat, a place where he could entertain friends and family at weekends, but also as a treasure house, a setting for his growing collection. The design of Waddesdon, conceived by his French architect Gabriel-Hyppolite Destailleur, was a reflection of his historical interests – an echo of French sixteenth-century chateaux architecturally, but inside a homage to eighteenth-century Parisian town houses.

From the moment that he purchased the Waddesdon estate in 1874, Ferdinand embarked on a monumental effort to create the house and its grounds on a site on which, by his own account, 'there was not a bush to be seen nor a bird to be heard' at the outset.<sup>3</sup> The top of the hill was levelled, the drives and terraces excavated, water had to be piped in from Aylesbury and materials brought to site on a specially constructed tramway. Mature trees were imported to landscape the grounds, and mounds and grottoes of artificial Pulham rock were constructed to house a menagerie of exotic species. Benjamin Disraeli, who witnessed the building of the Manor, is said to have commented that the Almighty would have accomplished the creation of the world in much less than seven days had he had the assistance of

the Rothschilds.<sup>4</sup>

Inside the house, one of the finest examples of what became known as '*le gout Rothschild*', were opulent interiors in which magnificent English eighteenth-century portraits looked down from silk-hung or carved panelled walls onto the finest examples of eighteenth-century French marquetry furniture, Sèvres and Meissen porcelain, Savonnerie carpets woven for the French royal palaces, gold boxes and other precious objects. It was a collection which was to become famous in its owner's lifetime.

Importantly, the house and garden were designed as an integrated whole – each critical to the visual appreciation of the other. Ferdinand and his landscape architect Elie Lainé laid out the grounds in a mixture of French-inspired formality and English parkland vistas, with a focal point of view or piece of sculpture at every turn, and with several delightful destinations for visitors, including an Aviary.<sup>5</sup> There were romantic Pulham rockwork outcrops that housed rare sheep, and extensive deer and animal pens. At the bottom of the hill were the huge range of glasshouses, supplied by James Halliday and Co., where Ferdinand's gardeners cultivated orchids, Malmaison carnations and tender species of fruit, and beyond these were the extensive kitchen gardens, and an ornamental Dairy, also with Pulhamite rockwork and a water garden.

This was what Alice inherited on Ferdinand's death in 1898. Her brother had never remarried after Evelina's death, so had no direct heir. Alice, his youngest sister, who had come to join him in England when he was widowed, was the obvious choice as his successor. From the very start she seems to have been determined to preserve her brother's creation and it is in large part thanks to Alice that Waddesdon and its collections remain in such good condition to this day. She was also a passionate and knowledgeable gardener. In many ways, the gardens could be said to have reached their zenith in her time, even though she made no major structural changes to the layout.

Alice was born in 1847, the youngest of Anselm and Charlotte's daughters. Like her siblings, Alice's childhood was divided between Paris, Frankfurt (where the family had a villa at Grüneberg), Vienna and holidays at the country estate in Silesia, Schillersdorf, where they revelled in riding and walking and Alice was able to indulge her undoubted skill for drawing and music. Her sketchbooks, two of which survive at Waddesdon, show that she had a good eye and was keenly observant, and that she also had an eye for and an interest in landscape.<sup>6</sup>